The Lady of the Spur

By David Potter

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CHAPTER VIII—Continued.

"As you please," I answered indifferently. "Meanwhile, sir, I beg to point out that you are on my land, and have been molesting my tenant."

Without a word or glance, he turned square on his heel and walked away through the arches of the pines.

I turned sharply on the girl. "Sue," I said, "I'm afraid you're a sad coquette—a mischief maker, Sue."

She made a little bob. "Sir? Oh, no, sir. I ain't—no, sir. He—he will bother me, sir."

A smutty faced man came abruptly around the corner of the house. "Here's dad," cried the girl. "Dad, here's the new squire."

The fellow—a lank but powerful man of middle age—made an awkward inclination of his head. I offered him my hand, and he took it after an apologetic glance at his charcoaled fingers.

"You have a pleasant place here, Buckaloo.'

"Thank you, sir," he answered. "It's all Sue's doin', though." His face hardened, and he eyed his daughter. "Didn't I see Squire Arnold just leavin' here?"

"Yes, dad," said the girl. "He came to see me—it wasn't my askin', though. He—he talked to me. O' course, there's only one thing he wanted to talk to me about. I slapped him, but he wouldn't go 'way. Then, then—" She looked at me rather saucily—"Squire Henry, he drove him away."

The charcoal burner regarded me with a certain uncouth dignity. "I'm much obliged to you. I'm on'y a poor man, but I tell you, Squire, there'll be shootin' if he don't leave my gel alone."

"I intend to make sure he does," I said. "If Mr. Arnold, or if Mr. Bram, comes here, I want you to let me know of it.'

"Mr. Bram on'y comes once in a long while, to look around like. He never bothers Sue—Squire Arnold's the one."

"I'd understood otherwise," I answered. "At any rate, if I visit you too often myself, you must remind me of it—even with a shotgun.' I laughed.

"I'm sure you'd always be welcome, sir."

I took a serious tone. "But remember, Sue, you must do your part—you must keep those brown eyes of yours quiet. Buckaloo, when you're away all day, send your daughter to stay with one of the neighbors."

"I'll do it, Squire," said the man gratefully.

As I rode away, I would have flattered myself that, in spite of my twenty-eight years, I had given counsel worthy of a real lord of the manor, had I not caught Sue pouting at me saucily from behind her father's back.

I crossed the lower edge of the fields to reach the post road. Leaping my horse over a locust hedge, I landed fair beside My Lady of the Spur, ambling pensively along on her gray gelding.

Before she could rouse her mount to action, I reined beside her with lifted cap.

"Good morning," I said. "You must let me introduce myself in form, Cousin Ferriss. I am Henry Morvan."

If my sudden appearance had startled her, she did not show it. Her gray eyes met mine coldly.

"If I see Mr. Henry Morvan," she answered, "I must be permitted to say I have no wish to claim kinship with him."

She wore the dark blue riding habit I had already seen her in on two occasions. My mind, sharpened by Bram's story of the girl's poverty, took in with pity that the skirt had been darned in a dozen places. The curves of her slim figure were outlined by the threadbare jacket. Her head was held proudly; but I was not to be rebuffed.

"Ah, Cousin," I said, "don't let us carry on our fathers' quarrels. Give me a chance before you hate me on account of others."

The girl flared out at me. "I hate you on your own account, sir."

"Cousin," I pleaded, "I beg you to wait a little—wait until you know me—then if you learn to hate me, 'twill be my own fault. Give me a chance as you'd give any stranger a chance. I'm not a Turk of a great-grandfather—nor the hot-headed fool of a grandfather, either. I'm only a harmless man who wants to be a friend."

"You talk prettily, sir, but I know you are not harmless."

"Believe me, I am, Cousin Ferriss."

"I cannot believe it." The short upper lip met the lower lip firmly.

"Why not?" I asked. "I'm the same man you warned at Pole Tavern only three days since. Ah, yes, I know now it was you—a mere veil can't hide you, Cousin. I'm sure you didn't think me a monster then. Just because I disregarded your advice—because I persisted in coming to Morvan—you won't spurn me—please!"

She did not attempt to deny her identity. "I knew who you were at Pole Tavern," she said, "but I did not know what you were." She met my startled gaze scornfully. "I detest a spy," she flashed.

"Ah—you recognized me last night—at the cabin window?"

"I did, sir."

"Cousin," I said, "one may be protector and spy at the same time."

"A lame excuse, indeed. I needed no protector, if that is what you mean."

"Perhaps." I laughed, not very mirthfully, I confess. "What does Bram say about it—about my being the man they were hunting last night?"

"Bram? He doesn't know it. I haven't told him—and shan't. His poor head has enough to carry already, I fear. Besides, I am not a tale bearer, even if Mr. Henry Morvan is a spy."

I began to grow resentful. "Cousin," I said, "you're unkind. You force me to say more than I intended. I had good reason to follow you last night."

"Indeed!"

"Yes, madam." I grew hotter as I went on. "Reason enough to make you understand why I played the spy."

"What was this mighty reason?" she demanded flippantly.

I thrust my hand in my breastpocket and brought out a soiled piece of paper. "This, Cousin. Possibly you recognize it. Read it, if you please."

Her face was quite unmoved, but she drew back daintily. "Read that? Not I. Why should I?"

"Then I'll read it for you," I exclaimed, "though doubtless you know its contents by heart."

Without waiting for her reply, I proceeded to read aloud. She sat in her saddle with a fine air of indifference, yet she made no move to ride away as she might well have done. I give the note, rude spelling and all.

"Squier Hen. Morvin we have heerd of you and we doant like what we heer now you got to get out of this befor worst happins to you you leav Morvin by this day weak if you doant love taranfethers this beer is fare warning so no more from yours truely but get PINE OWL.

Under the signature was a rude drawing in charcoal—a skeleton owl grotesquely perched on a skeleton horse, and brandishing in its claws what might have been meant either for a tarbrush or a torch.

"There, Cousin Ferriss," I said. "That's my reason. I found this precious document pinned to a porch pillar, the first night I came to Morvan."

"Your reason is beside the point," she retorted. "Must you spy upon me, merely because there are runaway slaves in the Barrens? Who was it made light of a warning he received at Pole Tavern? And now because he sees it down in black and white, instead of hearing it from the lips of a woman, he must peer into windows at night. I might have supposed the squire of Morvan had more courage!"

"Courage enough, perhaps," I rejoined with sarcasm. "But I saw this picture thrust in your belt the night I had the honor to receive you in the cherry room."

She laughed outright. "That ridiculous picture? In my belt? You are mistaken."

"What! You deny it?"

"I deny it, sir." She gathered the reins. "I deny it, absolutely." She touched her horse with the spur, and he ambled away leisurely away.

"Would she tell me a downright lie?" I mused. "I'll swear I saw that owl picture in her belt—that picture or one just like it." I gave a long whistle. "By heaven! one just like it!"

CHAPTER IX.

Sketches in Charcoal.

I reached the village in half an hour's brisk canter. Old Saint Peter's church at one end of the long street, Bat Merry's tavern at the other, and a score or so of houses between, made up the town.

I speedily found the place I was seeking—a house with a sign bearing the legend: "Law Offices of Thomas Stockton, Esquire, Counsellor-at-Law, and Master in the Court of Chancery, State of New Jersey," and in smaller letters below: "The Morvan Estate."

A black boy ran out to tie my horse and, in response to my question, said Squire Stockton was in.

I found the lawyer in a book-lined office—a man of 70 or thereabouts, as I learned later, but looking younger by twenty years. He sprang to his feet when I introduced my self.

"What! Henry Morvan? You've grown, Henry, since I last saw you. Let's see! You must have been six or eight years old then— no wonder you've grown. Ha, ha! You were as lively a mannikin for your age as I ever saw. I'm glad to see you—glad you've decided to come back and settle down at the old place. It's been running to seed a little, without a real master—"bring some Jamaica and some water—the flat bottle, mind—not the demijohn. Keep the demijohn for ordinary visitors, Henry, you understand. Yes, the flat bottle, Dick." He squared his shoulders. "Well, sir, a day more and you would have had a call from me. Socially, socially, not professionally. Although everything is ready for an accounting at any time. What!"

"No hurry for that," I answered. "The accounts are better in your hands than in mine. But, to tell the truth, I have come to see you on business."

"Ah, I see," said the old gentleman. "Dick, put the bottle there. Where are the tumblers? Oh, all right. And, Dick, tell Mr. Fithian to look up those mortgages we were talking about, and to tell anybody who calls that I'm busy."

He waited until the boy had withdrawn and had closed the door of the office. "Business, Henry, yet not about the accounts? Yes, I dare say I understand. A little ready money—what! Always useful to a young man—even in the country." He whirled to his desk. "I can let you have a couple of hundred now, and tomorrow—"

"No, no," I interrupted, the more hastily lest I should yield to the temptation. "I've plenty of money on hand. It's a more serious matter than pocket money."

"What! More serious! You haven't been getting married to some Choctaw squaw?"

"No fear of that," I laughed.

He squared his shoulders, and dropped into a chair. "Let's hear it—let's hear it."

"Mr. Stockton," I began, "I've come to you about something rather beyond your duty to your client, perhaps; But I've come because, to be quite open with you, you're the only man I can trust." He bowed gravely, his keen eyes upon me. "I've absolutely no friends here—the very house-servants and gardeners are more attached to my cousin Bram than they are to me. That's natural enough—they hardly know me. And Bram—" I paused.

"Bram Morvan? He's your friend, isn't he? What!"

"I fear not," I rejoined. "And that's precisely the reason I want your advice—to let you judge for me."

With that I told him all I knew—which was little enough, and all I suspected—which was a deal more. The lawyer listened, glancing at me sharply from time to time.

"So, you see, it's all in a cloud," I concluded. "There's nothing to lay hold of—that is, nothing I care to lay hold of. Of course, whatever happens, I don't want Bram's name to come out. And there's my cousin, Miss Ferriss Dayton, to consider, too—there's been enough rowing among the Morvans in our grandfathers' time to shame twenty families. I don't want more now." I flattered myself that no one, though twice a Morvan, could have shown himself more solicitous for the family name. "It won't do to raid the old Swede's cabin on the ground that it's a harboring place for footpads, because, if we caught any of the rascals, they'd be sure to incriminate Bram—perhaps Miss Dayton as well. No, that won't do. Besides, a posse couldn't get within five miles of the place before the birds would be flown. I suppose the only thing to do is to await what happens."

"By the Eternal, Henry!— that has a confoundedly Jacksonian sound, but it's handy. By the Eternal! you ought to be a lawyer. A lucid statement, sir—lucid and most convincing. A just conclusion, too! That is, not in law—no, many be not even just in equity, but for the honor of the family. Bramfield Morvan—what! He's a wild one, very wild. He's has a crowd of young hawks hanging around Morvan for years—Lawrence Arnold, and a swarm of riff-raff I didn't even know the names of."

"'Brownie' Davis, perhaps," I suggested, "and Bill Garrison, and Lentz."

"Very likely. It wasn't for me to interfere since you had given Bram express permission to live there. But I didn't think he'd ever go so far as he has. No, no, we must keep it quiet. Your plan is the right one—we'll do nothing—for the honor of the family, I believe that's best. What!"

"I hope so," I answered truthfully. "I don't see anything else to do."

"Nor I, but it's hard on you. Those oafs might really tar and feather you. Such things have happened in the Barrens—more than once, too—more than once."

"I have a double-barreled Manton in the house," I returned, "and a German military rifle, beside pistols. A flintlock—my grandfather's flintlock—looks serviceable, too. I dare wager I can take care of any callers."

"No, no, it won't do," exclaimed Mr. Stockton. "You can't be always awake. You must have some one to help you. A garrison, that's what you need. A couple of reliable men, say—men who're used to firearms. You can hire them as laborers about Morvan, and let them sleep in the manor-house at night. The three of you might be strong enough to keep off Pine Owls."

"Pine Owls! Bah! If there are any." I did not much relish the idea of calling in others for my defense. "If there are any unfeathered Pine Owls," I repeated.

"Oh, there are—there are," returned the lawyer. "No doubt of that to my mind. A garrison—what! Good idea—excellent." He squared his shoulders and stalked up and down the room. "Let me see—two reliable men. Everybody hunts hereabouts—no trouble about knowing how to shoot. But two reliable men—two. By the Eternal! I'm no Diogenes, and it makes me blush for the county to say it, but I only know one man who's reliable."

"Who is he?"

"Lem Baker—one of your own farmers. He has that white farmhouse in the far corner of your big wheatfield—beyond the three oak trees."

"I know the place."

"Yes—that's a good property, by the way. He's the man. A sober, honest chap—I've hunted quail with him more than once. He hasn't any family—he could as well sleep at Morvan as not. But there ought to be another—ought to be another."

He jerked himself abruptly about. "Why not me, Henry? What! Why not me?"

"You?"

"Yes. Why not—why not? By the Eternal! I haven't had a real brush since our first war with the British. I'd be glad of the chance to fire a shot in earnest once more. There's nobody but my old housekeeper to care what I do." He turned to a cabinet beside his desk. "Look here! I keep my beauties here—just to look at them once in a while for the sake of old times. Yes, yes, to remind me of the days when I'd quarrel with a man because he had hazel eyes—like Mercutio, you remember. Did you know I used to be in the navy, Henry?"

"I'd forgotten it, sir."

"So had I—almost. Ah, here they are. They've seen service in their time, too—both in public and private affairs—public and private." He placed a pair of handsome duelling pistols on the desk. "What d'ye think of them, Henry?"

I handled them with becoming reverence. "I never saw finer in my life."

"You're right. They're as good as they look, too, and will shoot to a knife edge." He stood up, buttoning his coat with abrupt gestures. "No hair triggers, mind you! General Jackson to the contrary notwithstanding. No hair triggers! A gentle, even pull—then you can hit your man when you please—taking it for granted you can hit your man when you please." He took up the nearest weapon and turning his profile toward the tall clock in the corner, extended his pistol arm stiffly. "I shot Lieutenant Brooke, R. N., with this very pistol—in Gibraltar, a couple of years after the war—lamed him for life, I'm afraid. So—" His aimed the weapon. "Your face and body behind your arm at the 'One.' Muzzle down, mind you!—not up—hot up. At the 'Two' begin to lift your piece. At 'Three'"—the hammer clicked—"you smash his kneecap."

He put down the pistol with a laugh. "That's the way I did it. I remember our seconds came to blows afterward—downright fisticuffs. They pummelled each other until they both rolled down a cliff and well bruised for their pains. I forgot what it was all about. But we'd all dined late the night before, and we didn't sophiscate our liquor in those days. Ha! Ha! Henry, I'll be part of your garrison. Will tomorrow night do to begin?"

"Yes," I answered, rising to go. "You'll arrange with Baker for me?"

"I'll attend to it. I'll simply tell him there are rumors of thieves about, and you want him to sleep at Morvan until further notice. He won't ask any questions. What!"

The lawyer waved me adieu from the sront, and I rode back up the little street. Several rough looking men were hanging over the horse rails at Bat Merry's Tavern, talking boisterously with a'fellow who had just ridden up and was in the act of dismounting. The newcomer had two or three ugly buck-teeth, and there was something familiar about his face.

After I had passed I realized who it was—the piner, Bill Garrison, who I had seen in the cabin in Lost Hollow.

I turned in my saddle to make sure, and perceived that the entire group of loungers was gaping after me. They broke into a hoarse laughter.

It was a bit of insolence that I did not like, but the yokels were beneath my notice, and I cantered homeward.

Posted on a hickory tree that formed one of the bounds of my land, a large sheet of paper caught my eye. There was an owl on horseback, rudely sketched in charcoal, and beneath these words:

"Squier Morvin the weak ant up yet but you go to go annyhow no rich man can go foolin round his tennunts purty dawter in this hear cownty so I tell you at once we are watchin you and you will pay for it if you fool round your tennunts purty dawter so get out of this cownty

Pine Owl."

I tore away the miserable scrawl, and trampled it angrily under my horse's hoofs.

CHAPTER X.

Feudal Dates.

The remainder of that day passed quietly. Bram had been absent since breakfast—so Joshua informed me—nor did he return to dinner. I was glad of it, for I could not have met him in the same complacent spirit I had displayed in the morning. My encounter with Ferris Dayton, and the accursed insinuations of Pine Owl's last proclamation, had pretty well upset me. I scowled at the venison haunch and glowered over the damasked cider until Joshua must have fancied that Betsey had furnished an ill-cooked meal for once.

Indeed, although but a few days in possession, I almost felt myself to be the veritable master of Morvan. I was able to give orders about the government of the household, to examine accounts, and to scan pictures and books, as if by right. I know not what wild dreams were already dancing through my head, impelling me to make permanent my deception—to turn it from the mad freak of a moment into the settled purpose of a lifetime. Not only was it possible!—it came to me so naturally that I vow it was not even difficult.

Dinner over, I unpacked my firearms and put them in order, giving even the old Deckard a thorough oiling.

After I had placed the guns in a rack in the hall, there was still something left of daylight—we dined early. I strolled down to the farmhouse beyond the oak trees to make the acquaintance of the tenant, Lem Baker.

He was sitting on the low porch, comfortably smoking—a sturdy man of about 25 or 26, with an honest, tanned face. He arose at my approach.

"Good evening, Baker," I said. "I've come to get acquainted. I am Henry Morvan."

"I'v seen you riding about, sir," replied the man respectfully. "Take the chair—I'll sit on the step here. Do you mind me smokin', Squire? Maybe you'll take a long clay yourself?"

"I believe I will," I answered. "I haven't smoked since dinner."

In a moment he had filled a fresh pipe for me and, after we were seated, we seemed to become friends at once.

"Do you like your farm, Baker?" I asked.

"First rate, sir. 'Specially, now you're here."

"I'll try not to make a hard landlord."

"I ain't afraid of that, Squire."

"Who keeps house for you, Baker? You aren't married, are you?"

"No, sir—I sort of do my own work." The farmer puffed at his pipe, then looked up at me with amusing shyness. "I was comin' to see you, Squire, about that very thing—after you got settled a bit."

"Good!" I rejoined. "I'm settled now—as settled as I ever will be. Can I help you in any way?"

"Well, yes, sir." He hesitated a moment. "You see, Squire, I wanted to ask you if you're willin' to have me and Sue Buckaloo get married next month."

I nearly dropped my pipe in mingled astonishment and joy. "Eh? Who?"

"Sue Buckaloo, sir. She's Tim Buckaloo's daughter. He lives on your land, over in the woods—runs a charcoal hill."

"I know," I interrupted. "I know them both. By George, yes, Baker! Marry her by all means. I'll let you have your farm six months rent free, for a wedding present."

"Do you mean it, Squire?"

"I certainly do. I'll make it a year, beginning today, if you'll marry her next week. Provided Sue is willing, of course," I added hastily.

"Oh, yes, I've spoken to her—to the old man, too. They're both willin'! But a year's rent free is a good deal, Squire, and this is the best farm on your place." The man's honest face showed his bewilderment. "You're sure you mean it, sir."

"I'll tell you the reason, Baker," I said frankly. "You'll pardon me if I speak out about your future wife. It's nothing against Sue, but I've been here long enough to see that she's too pretty to be a piner's daughter, or at any rate, to live in the pines. Then—I'm her landlord, and some cursed billingsgaters have already written to me what they wouldn't dare say to my face. She ought to be married to a good man—the sooner the better."

The farmer nodded gravely. "I understand, Squire—I know just what you mean. You're right—right all the way through. Well, I 'll marry her next week, if she's willin', and I guess she'll be." His face shone. "I love her, and she loves me, if she is nothin' but a foolish child—I'll look after her, please God."

I vow the man made me gulp a little. "Please God," I agreed. "And a year's rent free begins today."

I went to bed that night as well pleased with myself as I had ever been in my life. I had almost persuaded myself that my kindness to Baker was not certain to prove pure moon shine.

The next I knew, the sun was shining in my eyes, and I heard "cousin" Bram roaring a song as he swaggered below my window. It was the infernal tune the Swedish crone had sung.

A girl, a bottle, and a gun,
To make the seasons flit—

I waited to hear no more, but sprang up and began to dress. Was it possible, I thought, that this reckless fellow, all bluff humor and geniality, was in league with a gang of outlaws against me—against Henry Morvan? What could he possibly hope to gain by it?

I found Bram had already had his breakfast and was off with the hounds to draw a thicket on the chance of a stray fox. He had left word he would ride with me if I would wait for an hour or two.

"No, thank you, my dear cousin," I muttered to myself. "I prefer my own company." I wondered if it were in any way possible to obtain the company of a certain other "cousin" that day, even if it were only to be taunted as a spy.

I had an inspiration that made me thrill—but first it seemed desirable to tell the Buckaloos of my talk with Lem Baker. I enjoyed playing the kindly lord of the manor.

It was not worth while waiting for my horse to be saddled, so, having given orders to have him ready against my return, I walked along the uplands and struck into the path to the piner's cottage.

Within a few yards of it a riderless horse, evidently badly frightened, dashed by me and went careering across the fields. While I stood wondering, Mr. Lawrence Arnold appeared, driven before the fowling piece of Tim Buckaloo. I fell in beside them.

"What's this?" I demanded sternly, though the matter was clear enough to my mind. "What's the trouble, now?"

"He's here after my gel again," exclaimed Buckaloo angrily. "He sneaked up here early—after I'd gone to work. I came back to get an axe and caught 'im walkin' along soft through the woods, back o' my house."

"Curse it!" cried Arnold, completely ignoring the piner's complaint. "The fool's frightened my brute so, he won't stop this side of Fairview—I'll have to foot it home." He glanced back at Buckaloo and hurried along as he spoke.

I was astounded at his indifference to what might well have been considered good cause for shame that he fairly led me by the nose.

"I haven't walked a mile in five years," he stormed, as he quickened his pace.

"Then it's high time you did, sir," I rejoined. "You seem to make tolerable progress—with the aid of a fowling piece. Besides, I venture to say your friends at Merry's Tavern will lend you a horse, if your legs fail you."

It was a chance shot, but it seemed to strike home.

"My friends at Merry's Tavern, Mr. Morvan? My friends do not live at an ordinary, sir. I don't know what your foreign customs may be." He never ceased his rapid walk.

"I had supposed you to be tolerably acquainted at ordinaries," I said with what I considered rare sarcasm.

"Not at all. Ged! Mr. Morvan, not at all. No gentleman hereabouts less acquainted, sir." Buckaloo and I nearly had to run to keep up with him.

Then, all at once, I saw his design. He had beguiled me very prettily almost to the edge of the woods. In another rod or two he would be in the fields—in sight of Morvan and of any of the farm hands who might glance our way—in sight even of travelers on the road. In a word, we would be in the public eye, where it would be impossible for me—since I was a Morvan, a proprietor considerate of my own dignity—to quarrel with him.

I clutched him by the arm and brought him to a halt. "Not so fast, sir," I said. "That will do, Buckaloo—I'll settle this matter with Mr. Arnold. You can go."

The piner hesitated, but one glance at my face convinced him that his interests were safe with me. He fell back to a respectful distance.

Arnold, relieved from the threat of Buckaloo's weapon, faced me sullenly. My sarcastic humor changed to anger as I caught his steady glower.

"Sir," I said, "for the second time I find you on my land without invitation—and for a purpose I scorn to name."

"What of it?" he demanded roughly.

"This!" I answered, and struck him smartly on the jaw.

He turned a fiery red. "By heaven!—" His wrath choked him.

"Send your second to Mr. Thomas Stockton," I said. "He'll act for me." I turned on my heel.

He stepped in front of me. "Now you're too fast," he growled. "I'll fight right enough. But not with swords or pistols—you're foreigner enough to beat me there. That's what you're counting on, eh? No, no. I'm not a Frenchified fencing master, nor a Dublin duellist, neither, but if you mean fight, fight with fists. Mill with me, if you dare—and do it now. There's a smooth piece of ground in the hollow beyond your boundary hickory."

If he had thought to frighten me with fisticuffs, he was soon undeceived.

"Any way you like." I rejoined, "and anywhere you please—the sooner, the better."

Without more words, we left the pines, and began to hurry across the fields. Bram came running toward us, a motley collection of hounds at his heels.

"There they go!" he yelled. "'Sight 'em, boys—sight 'em!" The dogs leaped about us, and Bram roared with laughter as Arnold and myself, in no mood for foolery, rebuffed them impatiently.

"Good dogs—good dogs!" Hark to 'em, lads! Seize 'em fast—fast! Hello, Lauris. Good morning, Hal. Ho, there! Stop, I say! Where are you two going at that gait? Is this a walking match? Where are you going?"

"To fight each other," I answered shortly.

"Eh? The deuce you say! You're joking."

"No—we're in earnest. We're about to fight—with fists. Come on!" I took him by the elbow and hurried him along. "I'm glad we met you. I want you to see fair play for both."

"Good Lord, boys!" he protested. "What are you talking about? You can't mean it. You two mustn't fight. It's downright disgraceful for two gentlemen to maul each other like a pair of common piners."

"Nevertheless, it has to be done."

"But you can't have any reason—you only met the other day."

"Our acquaintance is already over-ripe."

He appealed to Arnold. Look here, Laurie, I don't want to interfere in a private matter, but, d'ye see—"

"Save your breath, Morvan," said his friend sullenly. "It's all settled."

After this Bram strode beside us in silence. Now and then I stole a glance at his rueful face. I vow I relished his expression mightily. It was for this I had pressed him into service—to make him realize, if possible, the falseness of his position—a professed friend but a secret enemy.

So presently we reached the grassy hollow beyond the boundary. Here was an open space, screened from the road by second growth hickory and the branching vines of the wild fox-grape. Thence hostile eyes might easily have spied upon me when I trampled Pine Owl's warning the day before.

Arnold and I removed our coats and neck cloths and gave them to Bram.

"What's it all about, Laurie?" he demanded.

"I'll tell you later," answered the other. He turned to me with a sneer. "If you're particular about your looks, Mr. Morvan, you can apologize. Probably you don't know I'm counted the best man with the knuckles in the lower counties."

I did not deign to tell him that only the year before I had held my own with the Louisville Spider for full six rounds. It was not for me to play the braggart, too. I finished my preparations.

"But, Hal, what's it about?" insisted Bram in desperation.

"You can call it trespass," I said.

"Yes," sneered Arnold, "that'll do. Call it trespassing, or call it poaching. Poaching on what you claim as your preserves, eh?"

"I hope to plant my fist against your vile mouth this instant," I rejoined.

We faced each other grimly.

It was over in five minutes. I had received several hard knocks—and twice I had felled Arnold to the ground.

After the second time, he lay on his face for a moment, then sat up weakly, and glared at me through his rapidly swelling eyelids.

"Enough!" he said thickly—his lips were badly cut. "Hereafter, I'll respect your wishes, Mr. Morvan."

I took my coat from the awe-struck Bram.

"After all," went on Arnold, "as her landlord, you've first claim to the girl."

I deigned no reply to this snarl of a beaten cur, but walked rapidly homeward across the fields.

CHAPTER XI.

A Fencing Lesson.

At the house I bathed my face—one of my cheeks was somewhat bruised—and donned my handsomest riding cloak. It was a piece of foppery for which I was soon to pay dear.

In a glove box, where Joshua had laid them when he unpacked my saddle bags, I found a pair of lady's gauntlets—plain, but very fine. They had been forwarded from London by the last Baltimore packet—so the young gentleman of Carlisle from whom I had won them had informed me.

I had made the gentleman's acquaintance at a horse race on the high street of Carlisle. I had seen him brandishing the gloves in air, and proclaiming himself eager to stake them on a black mare against anything of near value. My judgment had been for a little chestnut, and a had accommodated the swaggerer by wagering a pair of bearskin leggings.

As it happened, the chestnut had passed the toll gate at the head of the street a full nose before the black mare, so my young buck had handed me the gloves—and had sworn savagely in the doing of it. At the time, I had stuffed them carelessly into my saddle bags, and so had forgotten them until this morning.

Now, wrapping them carefully, I thrust them into my pocket, and descended to the horse block.

One of my black boys was holding a mount in readiness. He was a merry, quick-eyed darky, and his interest in my spruce appearance was so great that he was unable to repress a tremendous grin.

"By the way, Sam," I said, as he released my stirrup, "I'd forgotten. Tell Joshua to have a couple of bedrooms made up tonight, will you? The—ah—what's the southeast room?"

"The Gineral Wash'ton room, sah."

"Yes, of course—the Washington room for Mr. Thomas Stockton, and one of the back ones for Lemuel Baker."

"Comp'ny comin', Mastah Henry?" grinned the boy. "Yes, sah—Ah'll tell 'im, sah. Mistah Joshway likes comp'ny. Heigh! but Ah reckon he won't keer 'bout that kind."

I was rather amused, for I had already chanced to overhear some bitter passages between the irreverent Sam and Joshua, who, as head of the servants' quarters, was jealous of his dignity.

"Why not?" I demanded.

"Why, 'cause they ain't frens o' Mastah Bram's, Ah reckon. 'Fo' you come, Mastah Henry, they was goins on in this here house. They was so! Mastah Bram's fens like to tore the house down, many's the time."

"What friends?" I asked, with assumed indifference.

"Mastah Bram's frens? Oh, Squiah Ahnold from Fayahview, and Bill Gahison—he's white trash from below here. Yas, sah, and 'Brownie' Davis, too."

He paused and looked at me with such expectancy that I was forced to ask, "Who is he?"

"What! ain't you heard 'bout him yet? He's the bully of this here county, less'n it's Squiah Ahnold. Yes, sah, he kicked a man's face in on'y las' month. He gave me a whippin' onet, damn his hide!" He checked himself. "Scuse me, Mastah Henry. 'Scuse me, sah."

All this was indeed interesting news. I might find a valuable ally in Sam. I adjusted my nag's mane and smoothed his neck carelessly.

"I should think Joshua wouldn't have liked such company," I remarked. "They must have caused him a deal of trouble."

"Liked it ? Who? Him? Yas, sah, Joshway more'n liked 'em, 'cause then he could git all the wine he wanted to drink. He drinks mdre Madeery 'n Mastah Bram ever thought o' drinkin'—heigh! and more apple jack, too, a heap sight." The boy grinned maliciously. "Ain't you ever noticed how kind a sleepy Joshway always is, Mastah Henry?"

I had noticed it. Joshua often performed his duty as butler in a sort of maze. The reason for this heaviness, and for "Mistah Joshway's" fondness for the society of Bram's friends was doubtless the same.

(To Be Continued.)

The Quest

James Whitcomb Riley

I am looking for Love. Has he passed this way,
With eyes as blue as the skies of May,
And a face as fair as the summer dawn?—
You answer back, but I wander on,
For you say: "Oh, yes; but his eyes were gray,
And his face as dim as a rainy day."

But stout of heart will I onward fare,
Knowing *my* Love is beyond somewhere;
The Love I seek, with the eyes of blue,
And the bright, sweet smile unknown of you;
And on from the hour his trail is found
I shall sing sonnets the whole year round.

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